

SUMMARY

Standard 1 – Watershed Health

Due to the existing diversity and amount of vegetative cover on uplands, the existing condition of primarily ephemeral channels, the management responsibility by industry and agencies to design and mitigate impacts from roads on hydrologic flow events and soil erosion, and the generally small number of management issues that need to be dealt with, it is determined that the Great Divide Basin and Upper/Lower Separation Creek/Boggy Meadows watersheds are meeting Standard #1.

Due to the existing diversity and amount of vegetative cover on uplands, the existing and improving trend in stream vegetation and channel morphology, and the small number of remaining management issues, it is determined that the majority of the Sweetwater River watershed within the report area is meeting Standard #1. The area failing this standard is Whiskey Creek in the Cherry Creek allotment due to livestock management practices. This constitutes about ½ mile of stream channel on public lands.

Due to the existing diversity and amount of vegetative cover on uplands, the existing and improving trend in stream vegetation and channel morphology, and the small number of remaining management issues, it is determined that the majority of the Sweetwater River watershed within the report area is meeting Standard #1. The area failing this standard is Sand Creek in the Buzzard allotment due to livestock management practices. This constitutes about 1½ mile of stream channel on public lands.

Standard 2 – Riparian/Wetland Health

There has been a tremendous improvement in riparian/wetland condition within the assessment area over the last 15 to 20 years, however, there are still some specific areas that need attention. Allotments containing riparian/wetland habitat that do not meet this standard have been described previously and include: Stewart Creek, Cyclone Rim, Jawbone, Cherry Creek, Ferris Mountain, Buzzard, Seminoe, Long Creek, and Wood Creek allotments. For lotic systems that are not meeting the minimum standard, there are 62 miles out of a total 128 miles. In lentic sites, there are 196 acres of a total 2161 acres, that do not meet the minimum standard.

Most of the lentic and lotic sites not meeting the standard have been, or are in the process of being addressed in management plans or as range improvement projects. Continued progress in grazing management of livestock and wild horses (where they are present) will ensure further improvement of all riparian areas within this area. Although there are areas where desired future condition is yet to be reached in woody species dominance and composition in the upper watersheds, these areas still meet the minimum standard of rangeland health. Other than the specific allotments listed previously, the remainder of the allotments within this assessment area are meeting Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health.

Standard 3 – Upland Vegetation Health

At the present, the review of upland vegetation conditions in the Great Divide Basin reveals generally good overall community health. Natural ecological and biological processes appear to be functioning adequately overall, although concerns about current, and especially near-future, functionality of certain community types remain. Specifically, the review group has determined

that the majority of upland vegetation communities are properly functioning in relation to the seral stage to which they have evolved. Several specific communities, however, are becoming rare (aspen) or elicit concerns due to their uniformity of age and structural class, and the imminent onset of over-maturity to decadence (big sagebrush and mountain shrub stands).

Aspen stands in the Ferris-Seminole Mountains area do not meet the standard for upland vegetation health due to decadence, disease, and decreasing occurrence and acreage due to encroachment by conifers. They occur next to seeps and drainages at lower elevations, as separate stands along the base of the mountain, and intermixed with conifers up on the mountain. The current acreage of aspen habitat in this area is about 500 acres. Livestock grazing is a component in the management scenario of these plant communities, but it is not the principle factor in non-attainment of this Standard.

Standard 4 – Wildlife/Threatened and Endangered Species/Fisheries Habitat Health, Weeds

Habitat needed to support healthy wildlife populations and listed or proposed threatened and endangered species is generally in acceptable condition. This does not mean that there aren't problems or concerns about wildlife habitat. The discussion under Standard #2 – Wetland/Riparian Health and Standard #3 – Upland Plant Health outlines the current conditions and recommendations for improving management of these resources. In many cases we may be meeting a standard but we fell short of our "desired or future" condition. On the other hand, our composition of native species is good, with just spot problems at this time with weeds. Due to the existing good condition of native vegetation and its ability to support the diverse wildlife populations we currently have, it is determined that the majority of Great Divide Basin assessment area is meeting Standard #4 with respect to wildlife. The principal area deemed not to be meeting Standard #4 for wildlife habitat is the Ferris Mountains, due to loss of aspen habitat and the disease, decadence, and encroachment of conifers into shrubland and riparian habitats. This area encompasses about 24,000 acres of public land. The following recommendations address action to help meet future desired resource conditions. Livestock grazing is not a principle factor in the non-attainment of this standard.

The improved management of riparian habitats through the use of grazing BMPs indicate both an upward trend and meeting Standard #4 for fisheries for some of the streams in the assessment area. However, many other sites that should support fisheries, currently do not. Standard #4 for fisheries is not being met on streams, which currently fail Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health. There are also sites that are rated in proper functioning condition, but due to the lack of overhead cover (stream shading) exceed temperature requirements for some fish species and won't support them. However, these sites have not yet been defined. Due to the lack of credible data on the status of native fishes in the watershed, whether Standard #4 is being met for these species is unknown.

Due to the existing good condition of native vegetation and the weed treatment program in place to control and/or eradicate identified weed problem areas, it is determined that the majority of the watershed is meeting Standard #4 with respect to weeds. There are known areas of noxious weeds that are rapidly expanding and are not being treated. These areas affect approximately 2400 acres. The following recommendations, in addition to following the Rawlins Weed Prevention Plan (BLM, 1999), would expand upon the success already achieved and help to meet desired resource conditions in the future.

Standard 5 – Water Quality

Within the assessment area, water quality impairment has not been identified by the State of Wyoming for any of the Great Divide Basin or the North Platte River drainage. Although specific compliance for some stream segments is unknown, nothing within available data indicates this Standard is not being met.

Standard 6 – Air Quality

Within this assessment area there is no air quality criteria pollutant non-attainment areas for either state or federal standards as determined by the Wyoming DEQ. Due to prevailing winds, limited pollution within the general area, overall air quality meets this Standard.

Allotments described in this report that do not meet Standards due to Livestock Grazing:

- Buzzard: Standard #1 – Watershed Health, Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Cherry Creek: Standard #1 – Watershed Health, Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Cyclone Rim: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Ferris Mountain: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Jawbone: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Long Creek: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Seminoe: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Stewart Creek: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health
- Wood Creek: Standard #2 – Riparian/Wetland Health

Standards not being met due to causes other than livestock grazing:

- Standard #1 - None
- Standard #2 - Riparian/wetland health due to wild horses in the Lost Creek and Stewart Creek HMAs; responsibility – BLM.
- Standard #3 - Upland plant health in aspen plant communities in the Ferris-Seminoe Mountains, and spot locations elsewhere; responsibility – BLM.
- Standard #4 - Shrub and woodland habitat around the Ferris-Seminoe Mountains totaling 24,000 acres; responsibility – BLM. Streams on public land that do not meet Standard #2 and are capable of supporting fish populations; responsibility – BLM. Expansion of noxious weeds on 2400 acres, primarily Russian knapweed and leafy spurge, into native rangelands due to lack of control on public lands and spread from private lands; responsibility – BLM, BOR, oil and gas industry, private landowners, County Weed and Pest Districts.
- Standard #5 - None
- Standard #6 - None

Allotments within the Great Divide Basin/Ferris and Seminole Mountains Standards and Guidelines assessment area that do meet the six Rangeland Standards:

- Bar Eleven
- Bell Springs
- Buzzard Ranch Meadows
- Chain Lakes
- Coal Bank Wash
- Daley Ranch
- Desert Claim
- Echo Springs
- Fillmore
- G.L.
- Haystack
- Junk Creek
- Larson Knolls
- Latham
- Lazy Y-S Ranch
- Little Camp Creek
- Monument Draw
- Monument Lake
- Muddy Creek Pasture
- North Creston-West
- North Tipton
- North Wamsutter
- Pole Canyon
- Red Desert
- Riner
- Ruby Knolls
- Sand Creek
- Sand Creek Ranch Pasture
- Sandstone
- Separation Flats
- Shamrock Hills
- Shamrock Pasture
- South Red Desert
- South Wamsutter
- Station 8
- Stone
- Tapers
- Tipton
- Wood Creek Ranch Pasture